

# HOUSES TOWNS AND COUNTRYSIDE

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on behalf of the undermentioned Associations

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## WHAT DOES IT MATTER TO YOU?

Who is responsible for the solution of the social problems we have in England to-day?

You will probably say that it is the Local Authorities, or that it is Parliament, or the appropriate Cabinet minister.

But you are responsible too.

How is that, you ask?

Because each one of us together forms that which is Public Opinion. Because it has been proved again and again that no Prime Minister, no Cabinet, and no Local Council can achieve any reform without the support of a strong Public Opinion. Because each one of us can go a long way towards making a strong Public Opinion by knowing what we want and by talking about it.

Only we must know what we want.

So we do, you say. We want peace; we want work; we want good education for every one; we want people looked after when they are old, and when they are ill; we want leisure, and pleasant surroundings when we are at leisure; and we do want a good home.

Now out of all the big social problems with which we expect our government to deal, Housing—the provision of adequate homes in the right place—looms as one of the most important. If we glance at the history of Housing during the last hundred years it is easy to see how action has been influenced by Public Opinion. Reformers arise who awaken interest in the subject; an Act is passed; some provision is made. But if Public interest dies down the Act is neglected and nothing more is done.

People are apt to think because the Housing problem is so much talked about, that its solution is only a matter still of a few years; yet if we look more closely into the subject we find that if ever there was a time when the influence of Public Opinion was needed it is to-day.

So it is for ordinary citizens, who are not experts, but who desire to form part of a sound Public Opinion, that this pamphlet on Housing and Town Planning is written, in the

hope that it may stimulate the desire to think and to know, without which no reform can be achieved.<sup>1</sup>

## LOOKING AT THE PROBLEM<sup>1</sup>

To be part of a sound Public Opinion on Housing we must know exactly what we want.<sup>2</sup> How are we going to find this out? I suggest we should set about it in this order:

1. Let us consider our own house and its neighbourhood, that of our friends, and that of other people in our locality. Are they all that we want, or is there anything lacking? This will give us some sort of standard.
2. Then we should remind ourselves of what the slums are really like, and what are the different types of slum.
3. This will lead us to wonder how such a problem has come about, so we must touch on the story of Housing.
4. Then we shall want to glance at what has been done to cope with the problem.
5. We must next consider whether enough has been done, or whether there are still things left to do.
6. If there are still any difficulties we must think of ways in which they can be met.

By this time we shall be more equipped to consider what we can ourselves do to help.

### (i) CONDITIONS IN YOUR LOCALITY

One of the first factors in knowing what you want for Housing and Town Planning is to know your own local conditions.

Suppose you collect a group of friends, and try and work out a standard of what you think every house should be. What is your own house like? If it is good you might take that as a standard. If it is bad, how do you want it improved?

<sup>1</sup> These numbers refer to Book List at end, capital letters to Exhibitions, and small letters to Films; see pages 32-35.

Is the house too small, or so big that the rent is too high? Have you a bathroom, and all you want in sanitary conveniences? Can you cook, and heat the house, cheaply? Are there plenty of cupboards? Is it well arranged, so that there is not a lot of unnecessary space to keep clean? Does the living room get plenty of sun, and the larder not too much?

Then what about the position of your house? Is it handy for buses and trains, for your work, for the shops, for a good walk, or for whatever game you play? What do you see from your windows? The house opposite, or something pleasant like a tree or a bit of garden? Are the neighbours friends or strangers, and if they are strangers have you any place where you can meet them, and get to know them?

By the time you and each of your friends have considered how you are situated with regard to these points, and others that you may think of, you will begin to have a pretty good idea of what most people want in their homes, and you will be in a better position to find out what is lacking in your neighbourhood.

But remember it is not merely a question of providing for your friends. Out of that huge crowd at the football match on Saturday, how many have satisfactory housing? How many of the people who fill the cinema in the evening have the things you have just decided are essential to a good home?

Yet these crowds are only a tiny bit of the population of England, and each town or village has its own problems, and its own type of slum. What is your speciality?<sup>2</sup> In some places the slums are worse in quantity, in others in quality. Some of the worst are in the centre of the cities, although there are some very bad country slums too. Perhaps they never seem so bad when to escape from them into green fields you have but to step from your front door, instead of travelling for an hour by a bus or train.

So in order to sketch in that background, which we must never forget if we are to deal properly with the subject, let us walk round one or two types of slum.

## (ii) THE SLUMS <sup>3.4</sup>

Let us take three kinds of slum: a London slum, a slum in a northern town like Leeds, and a country slum.

### (a) LONDON SLUMS

In London the basement slum is very prevalent. Let us visit the Smiths, who live in two rooms well below the level of the ground. Be careful you do not slip going down the area steps. They are greasy and crumbling. Yes, that is the dustbin, as you can smell, just outside the living room window. Before we knock on the door, just take a glance at the window curtains. They are Nottingham lace, very carefully patched and washed, and hiding the squalor within. They are Mrs Smith's one effort at self-expression, and they show the house-pride within her, which is ready to rise to the surface whenever an opportunity is given her, and protect her privacy from the inquisitive eyes of the passer-by in the street such a few feet away.

Mrs Smith opens the door for us, and we follow her down a damp, dark passage, from which the wallpaper is peeling, into a room on the right. The room is crammed with furniture. There is a big range, a dresser, and a table in the middle on which the family eat and do their work. In one corner is a big double bed. In the other a single one. There are some chairs for the family to sit on, and by way of filling up every inch of air space, a line is stretched across the ceiling from which hangs the family washing.

It is dark and the gas is alight. The gas is always alight. Through the lace curtains the only view is the wall of the area some two yards away, and the feet of the passers-by overhead.

Charley, the eldest boy, is working for a scholarship to a secondary school. They don't think he'll get it. He's clever enough, but he has nowhere at home where he can study quietly, and he cannot get restful nights because the bugs bite him. They bite the whole family. Nothing will keep them down. For those acquainted with the signs, it is pos-

sible to pick out in a school the children who come from verminous homes, and the ones who do not.

None of the family is well. It is not only the darkness and the damp, and the bugs and the stale air from the dustbin, that affects their health. It is the nervous friction of being one on top of the other, of having nowhere to escape to. If one of them has a cold, or any other infectious disease, probably the whole family catches it.

Mrs Smith worries because the family is not being brought up decently, as she would like. They have only two rooms, and there are two boys and two girls. It is impossible to have privacy, and it is difficult to prevent a deterioration of moral standards in conditions such as these.

Do not think that this is an isolated case. There are even now some 19,000 of these basement dwellings in London alone. We shall meet the Smiths again, but for the moment we must leave London and take a look at Leeds.

#### (b) LEEDS SLUM

Row upon row you will find them, monotonous little two-storey houses. You walk straight into the living room from the street. A staircase leads out of it to the one room above, and that is the whole house. If you stand with your back to the front door, the wall on the right is the wall of another house, the wall on the left is the wall of another house, and the wall in front of you is the wall of another house. In other words, the houses are back to back, and you can never get a good current of air through them. Every eight houses or so there comes a narrow passage into the next street. In this is the one water tap and water closet that serves the eight houses on each side. It is impossible to expect standards of cleanliness and decency in such conditions as these. Yet, until a few years ago, there were seventy-five thousand of these houses in Leeds.

#### (c) COUNTRY SLUM

Finally, let us take a trip to a country slum in the Midlands. In Northamptonshire, says Dr James Mackintosh in

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a most engrossing report which you should read,<sup>6</sup> there are three types of dilapidated property: the old stone cottage, the converted barn, and the nineteenth century brick row. Here speaks a tenant of one of them:

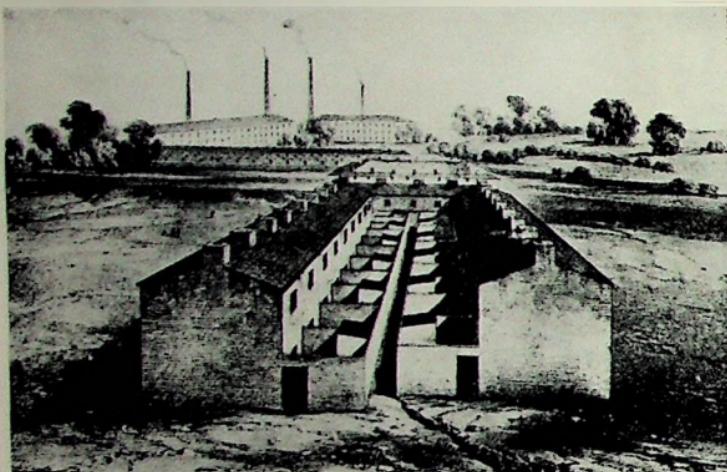
"It is true that my rent is only 4s. 6d. here, and that I should have to pay 6s. for a Council house. But does any one realize what it costs me in waste to live here? I have to fetch every drop of water from the well there"—she pointed down a fairly steep hill across a muddy field. "Then I have to boil it on that old range for every purpose, cooking, dish-washing, house-cleaning, and the weekly clothes-washing. Every drop of water I have to take across the road, and empty down that drain. All refuse, with the contents of the bucket-closets, has to be buried in that tiny patch of garden. You see that floor"—pointing to hills and valleys of rough brick on which her living-room table rocked to and fro—"every time I try to wash that, we have to keep up a roaring fire, or it won't dry at all. And if I don't keep a regular fire in the parlour, all my furniture gets mouldy . . ."

Here, then we have three types of slum, which proves that, wherever one lives, whether in London, in a provincial city, or in the country, there is probably much to find out about, and much to get remedied.

### (iii) THE STORY OF THE HOUSING PROBLEM <sup>B</sup>

But how did this Housing problem become so acute, you say? Do you know the story of Housing? You should, because to know what mistakes have been made in the past, helps when we consider the future. We have only room for a bare outline here, but it may be enough to make you want more.

Most of our present Housing troubles started more than a century ago with the Industrial Revolution. The development of machinery was rapidly proceeding, and people were in a hurry to make use of it. So they built their factories as quickly as they could, and threw up a few hundred



INDUSTRIAL TOWN, 1839



WELWYN GARDEN CITY, 1939



LIVING AND SLEEPING ROOM IN A GARDENLESS SLUM



LIVING ROOM IN A HOUSE WITH GARDEN

huts nearby for the workers to live in. If the workers had shelter for the few hours they were away from the factory, that was all that mattered. What more could they want? Neither the factory owners nor the legislators knew or cared.

So began our muddled, monotonous, sordid industrial cities, parts of which are only now beginning to be cleared away, while other parts are still growing higgledy-piggledy. Back-to-back houses were easier and cheaper to build, and you could crowd them more closely on to the land, and no one thought of the future, which could look after itself. It is this legacy we have inherited to-day. But have we even now learnt our lesson?

In due course reformers arose, in response, mark you, to Public Opinion. There was Chadwick, who showed in his report the horror of the insanitary conditions in London. There was Lord Shaftesbury,<sup>7</sup> the pioneer of Housing legislation. There was Octavia Hill,<sup>c8</sup> who improved the relationship between landlord and tenant. And by the end of the century there sat in the law-courts a Mr Howard, a shorthand-writer of no great importance, who sometimes permitted his thoughts to stray from the speeches he was taking down to a dream city, where even the factories were beautiful, and every worker in them had a garden to his house.

Of these, and many more, you may read the story, and each story is a romance.

By 1914 there existed a good deal of Housing legislation.<sup>9</sup> It began with Shaftesbury's Act in 1851, the Acts of Mr Torrens and Sir Richard Cross in 1868 and 1875; made great strides forward with the Housing of the Working Classes Acts of 1885 and 1890, and the Act of 1909 which mentioned, for the first time, those magic words Town Planning.

Until these Acts gradually extended social control by byelaws, you could build houses almost anywhere, any shape or size, as thick on the ground as you cared to pack them, and with as few conveniences as you chose. Any one could build them. There was no plan, and no forethought.

And it was not until 1890 that local councils could build houses themselves.

In 1914 the Great War started, and for four or five years very few new houses were built. Thus not only were there not enough new homes to allow for the increase in the population, but the houses which were growing old and decaying were not replaced.

Some people are very much surprised at the scarcity of houses after the War, since they feel that the population cannot have much increased when so many people were killed. It did, however, and there was a still greater increase in the number of families. Supposing, for example, the population of a village was ninety. You could have ten families with nine people in each, who would want ten large houses, or you could have fifteen families with six people in each, so that you needed fifteen houses. This is the sort of change that happened to the population of England. The families were smaller, but there were more of them, and each family, of course, needed a separate dwelling.

Also people continued to flock from the country to the towns, so that more houses were needed for them there.

So when the war ended and the soldiers came back, there were not enough homes for them to come to, and such homes as there were, were many of them unfit for human habitation.

Now, before we go on to find what was done about it, we must notice one thing.

Before the War nearly all houses of every kind were built by private people, what we speak of as private enterprise. They built houses to let as well as houses to buy, and were able to make a satisfactory enough profit to enable them to go on doing so.

After the War, however, all costs rose tremendously. Buildings of all kinds were needed, which meant a rise in the prices, both of materials and of labour, and it was not possible for private individuals to build at sufficiently cheap rents for many weekly wage-earners.

One is apt to forget, too, that the standards of living

were steadily rising. At the beginning of this century quite large and luxurious country houses had no bathroom, while electric light was hardly known even in the towns. But now people began to expect to find these and many other conveniences in the lowest-rented houses, so that even without a rise in building costs a house would have been more expensive to provide.

What was to be done? How could a supply of low-rented houses be procured?

#### (iv) MEASURES TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM

##### (a) 1919-30

Up till now the only help the Local Authorities could receive towards building low-rented houses was from the rates. No grant had been given from the Central Government in any of the Acts previously passed. But now in order to stimulate the building of such houses a new idea was started as an emergency expedient, which has, however, endured in one form or another till the present day. This was the idea of a subsidy from the government.

Sometimes this subsidy has been given to the Local Councils; sometimes to Private Enterprise. Sometimes a sum is given for every person rehoused, sometimes for every new house that is built. But a Government Subsidy in some form or another has been provided in every Housing Act since the War, and it looks as if it had come to stay.

The ratepayer has also to contribute, and if you look on the demand note for the payment of your rates, you will probably find that a proportion of them goes towards the Housing in your neighbourhood. You will be surprised to find what a small proportion it is, and you will realize that even if an addition is demanded, you are still not contributing a very large sum for Housing purposes.

Private enterprise, however, found it impossible to make any profit by building houses to let for the poorer paid

workers, even when they were granted a subsidy. So, until recently, they have mostly built houses for sale for those who could afford them, and the responsibility for providing dwellings to let at low rents has fallen more and more upon the Local Authorities.

Between 1919 and 1930 a series of Housing Acts were passed, to stimulate house building, and by 1930 private enterprise and the Local Councils together had built about two million houses, in an effort to make up the shortage.<sup>10</sup>

The standards of room space, garden space, and so on, adopted in these schemes is worth your study. The Ministry of Health consider that the living room should have 180 sq. feet of floor space, and that one bedroom should have 150 sq. feet, and none be less than 80 sq. feet.<sup>11</sup> Also that every house should have a separate bathroom, and that houses should not be built at a greater density than twelve houses to the acre. It has not been found practicable always to observe these standards. What would you consider to be the standards, which ought to be insisted upon?

The Local Councils were not able to do much in the way of pulling down the slums. They had the power to do so, and Mr Chamberlain's Act of 1923 provided a State subsidy of half the loss on important schemes, but this did not prove sufficient to induce action on a large scale.

#### (b) 1930-39<sup>12</sup>

The slum problem still remained.

Now there are two kinds of slum. There is the kind where the houses are so bad, so crumbling, and so insanitary that there is nothing to be done except pull them down and start again. And there is the kind where the houses themselves are fairly sound, but there are so many people in them that that in itself makes a slum. It is on these two kinds that Housing reforms have been concentrated since 1930.

The Housing Act of 1930 dealt with Slum Clearance, that is to say the actual pulling down of old and insanitary dwellings. The Councils were asked to find out the really bad slums in their areas, and either to pull them down or to

improve them. A subsidy was given for each person who had to be re-housed.

In 1933 by the Housing (Financial Provisions) Act all subsidies, other than those for slum clearance, were repealed.

The Act of 1935 dealt with overcrowding.<sup>13</sup> The Local Authorities were asked this time to find out how many people were overcrowded in their areas, and to provide new dwellings for them. After a certain date it was to be illegal if there were more than two persons to every room in a dwelling (counting a child as half a person). This was the first time there had ever been a national standard of overcrowding.

The subsidy in this Act was given for every dwelling that was built to relieve overcrowding, according to the cost of the land they were built on. The more expensive the land, the bigger the subsidy. Now you will see that this enables the Local Authorities to erect high blocks of flats in the centre of a town, where the land is most expensive, because they can get a bigger subsidy. Is this a good plan, do you think?

In 1936 these two Acts were rolled into one, and in 1938 another Act altered the subsidies so as to put building for slum clearance and building for overcrowding on an equal basis. This Act also made special provisions for the housing of Rural Workers, a section of the population which had been rather neglected by the Housing Laws up till now.<sup>14</sup>

This is the law under which we are working to-day.

#### (c) THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL 15.16

Among the many schemes that were carried out under these Acts by the Local Authorities, by far the largest were those of the London County Council. Unable to find land within their boundaries at a reasonable price, or in a sufficient quantity for their requirements, they were obliged to spread their Housing activities outside their own administrative area.<sup>17</sup> The biggest and possibly the most famous of these outside estates is at Becontree,<sup>18</sup> where

more than 100,000 people have been rehoused, in good homes with gardens. As you may imagine, this huge undertaking set up new problems of its own, which we shall come to later on. Altogether the L.C.C. has built 70,514 dwellings since the War.

(d) OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES

But there are other Local Authorities which have also been very active during the last ten years. By 1937 the Corporation of Liverpool<sup>19</sup> had built 34,512 dwellings since the War, some inside and some on the outskirts of the town, and this was the first city to start replanning portions of the central built-up areas under the 1935 Act. They have completed 3,000 dwellings in the last twelve months, and they are now in process of re-developing no less than six different areas.

Birmingham has built over 50,000 houses since the War, 2,000 of which have been built without the Government subsidy. It has spent nearly £25 million on its housing. In December, 1938, the Council adopted a scheme to erect 20,500 houses in the next five years at a cost of £12 million.

One of the most interesting of the Local Authority undertakings is the development of Wythenshawe by the Manchester Corporation.<sup>20</sup> The idea originated immediately after the War. 5,500 acres of land have been purchased by the Corporation at a little distance from Manchester. Parkways run right through the estate, in which 3,000 acres are reserved for housing, 1,000 acres for a permanent agricultural belt, and another 1,000 for open spaces of different kinds. Schools are being built, largely on the open-air principle, and from five to ten acres of land are being allotted to each school. Shops have been built in suitable numbers and positions, a suitable site has been reserved for a civic centre, and sites have also been allotted for factories so as to provide local employment. By the time it is finished Wythenshawe will be a town of about 100,000 people.

A similar scheme in some respects is being planned for

Aberdeen, at Kincorth, where the Council has arranged for a scheme of 600 acres, to contain 4,000 houses, community centres, libraries, maternity and child welfare centres, seven schools, shopping centres, and public playgrounds.

These are but a few examples chosen at random from the work of Local Authorities in many different parts of the country.<sup>b</sup>

#### (e) THE VOLUNTARY HOUSING SOCIETIES<sup>21</sup>

Much smaller, but still very useful, is the work of the Voluntary Housing Societies. There are now some 250 of these Societies in existence. Some of them are content to rouse the attention of Public Opinion to the conditions in their locality, and to urge the Local Council to improve them. Other Societies build flats or houses, and by raising their money very cheaply are able to let them at very low rents. These have also done invaluable pioneer work by providing new ideas on which a Council might have hesitated to spend public funds, but which have been adopted on a large scale once they have been tested.

An organization called the National Federation of Housing Societies<sup>22</sup> co-ordinates the work of these Associations, and if you want to know whether there is a Housing Society in your district, or if not, how you can start one, you need only write to the Secretary of the National Federation, 13 Suffolk Street, London, S.W.1, and he will tell you all about it.

#### (v) PROBLEMS OF TO-DAY

Well, you say, if all this is being done, if every type of bad housing is being dealt with, if the Government, the Councils, and the Housing Societies are all working so hard to do away with the problem, what is there to bother about? It is only a question of time. A few years more, and everything will be all right.

Will it? Or are the remedies themselves creating new problems? Let us find out what is actually happening before we lie back and say that there is nothing more for us to do.

We want you to imagine you are the Director of Housing for the whole country. It is up to you to find a solution for any problems that may appear. It is by no means always the expert who has thought of the best solution in the past, and even talking about such problems does some good, by drawing attention to them. So try to think of an answer for yourselves, before reading about the new ones that have been suggested by other people.

Let us now go back to our friends, the Smiths, who, you remember, were living in London in two rooms. To their delight the day arrives when some such measures as we have been telling you about reach their door, and it is their turn to move. Their two rooms are part of a big clearance scheme by the local council. The whole area is to be pulled down, and the Smiths are to be moved to a new Housing Estate.

#### Problem 1: RENT AND WAGES

Now Mr Smith earns £2 10s. od. a week. At present he is paying 12s. a week for his two rooms. His family, you remember, consisted of two girls and two boys, so they must have three bedrooms, a living room, and a kitchen. But land is so expensive in the centre of cities that the Smiths will be lucky if they get that amount of accommodation at less than 16s. a week. Of course they get a lot for the money, much more than they did for their 12s. in the old place. But it isn't a question of what it's worth. It's a question of whether they can afford it at all. Sixteen shillings is nearly one-third of Mr Smith's income, so that after he has paid the rent, he will only have £1 14s. od. for food, heating, lighting, clothes, fares, and all the other necessities. The children are all at school still. They can't contribute anything to help. Will it perhaps mean that in order to pay this rent, they must economize in food? But if the children don't get enough to eat they might as well be back in their old slum.

The better conditions won't make up for shortage of food.

So here is Problem No. 1: How are the Smiths to pay the rent of their new dwelling, without depriving themselves of necessities?

#### Problem 2: NEW SURROUNDINGS

All their lives the Smiths have had to put up with make-shifts. Mrs Smith has had one cold water tap in the back yard with which to keep her home and her children clean. She has never cooked in a modern grate. She has never had a bath in a bathroom. She has never had a garden. Now she is moved to a place with running water, with all kinds of new gadgets, with so much light that you can see every mark on the paint, with extra rooms that somehow must be furnished. It is a sudden change. The myth about the tenant who keeps his coals in the bath has been exploded long ago, but there is no doubt that Mrs Smith needs a helping hand to assist her to take advantage of all the benefits of her new home. She is only too anxious to do so. But to whom can she go?

Problem No. 2: Who can help Mrs Smith?

#### Problem 3: LIFE AMONG STRANGERS

The Smiths have always lived in the same street. They know all the neighbours, and are on very friendly terms. When there is a spare moment one or other of them always runs in for a gossip. It is a kindly little community. Moreover, Mrs Smith knows just where to go to do her bit of shopping.

Now, even if the Smiths are moved to a block of flats or a new cottage estate, it will, as likely as not, be in a different neighbourhood. They may even be moved out of the locality altogether. They will find themselves among strangers, perhaps many hundreds of them, all shut in behind their front doors. It will be an entirely new type of dwelling to them. The shops may be a long way away, and the things in them may cost more. It is all lovely so long as the novelty

of the new place is upon them. But when that has worn off it begins to be lonely.

Problem No. 3: How are the Smiths to get to know their neighbours, and how are all these strangers to settle down together into a new community?

**Problem 4: FLATS OR HOUSES?**

It is possible that the Smiths may be given a choice. They can move into a block of flats in the centre of their city, or they can move into one of the new estates on the outside, like the ones I described to you that were built by the L.C.C.

It would be lovely, they think, to have a little house of their own with a garden. They all love flowers, and Mr Smith has always hankered to dig, and to grow his own vegetables. The air, too, and the quiet, would be good for Mrs Smith, who is delicate, and also for the children, who have never been really well in the smoky city.

But it means, of course, that Mr Smith must travel to and from his work in the centre of the town every day. It will entail at least half an hour's travel, and is more likely to be an hour, standing probably in a crowd, since he will be coming and going in the rush hours. Instead of the 1d. bus or bicycle ride to which he has been accustomed, he may have to spend 6d. to 1s. 2d. a day. This means three to seven shillings a week on to his rent, which we have already found he can scarcely afford.

Besides this he will have between one and two hours a day less spare time, and it will mean that he arrives at his home, and even at his work, tired by the long journey.

If, on the other hand, the Smiths choose a flat in one of the big new blocks which is near Mr Smith's work, it may mean that Mrs Smith has to drag herself and the children up five flights of stairs, for lifts are too expensive to provide in a low-rented block of flats. If she wants to get rid of the children while she does her washing, she cannot tell them to run out and play in the garden, where she can keep an eye on them. There is only an asphalt playground five floors below, and who knows what they may be up to there?

The Smiths, remember, are only one family of many thousands to whom this problem presents itself. If these thousands move to blocks of flats they are adding to the traffic problem and the danger of the crowded streets, and though they may not be overcrowded in their flats, they are overcrowded on the land on which those flats are built.

How are the Smiths to avoid the bad points, and combine the good ones of each alternative? That is Problem No. 4.

#### Problem 5: HOUSING IN THE COUNTRY<sup>D</sup>

Up till now we have only dealt with the problem of people living in a town. But now we get to those that affect people living in the country.

We have already said that people now want a much higher standard of living, both in their work and in their recreation, and, as a result of this, rural workers badly housed in the depths of the country, are beginning to feel isolated and out of touch. Difficulties with water supply, heating, and lighting, make them long for the amenities of places where these things come at the turning of a switch or a tap. Educational facilities are hard to reach, even with a network of buses, and such distractions as music or the theatre are probably out of the question. Above all it is in the towns that the better paid jobs are to be found, so it is hardly surprising that many of the younger members of the rural population are tending to drift towards the already congested cities.<sup>30</sup>

Problem No. 5, then, is how can we provide satisfactory amenities for the country worker?

#### Problem 6: THE SPRAWLING TOWNS

This is another problem of the countryside, and one which deeply affects everybody, not only the rural worker.

We can see for ourselves wherever we live in England, that all the new housing schemes now being carried out are either built high in the centre of the towns, or, to an even greater extent, out on the fringes of the towns. The towns

are spreading. They are absorbing people from the country for the reasons we saw in Problem 5. They are growing month by month, and year by year. You have seen it happen in your own lifetime. Can you not recall some bit of country near by that is now country no longer?

What is to happen? So many houses are still needed. Must the towns go on growing larger and larger, enveloping the villages near them, until their tentacles have spread over the whole countryside? Will your house, now so quiet, and in a country lane, wake one day to find it has been caught up by the nearest big town?

Problem No. 6: How are we to save our countryside?

#### (vi) SUGGESTIONS FOR REMEDIES

Here are some suggested solutions to these problems. Don't assume they are the only solutions. They may not even be the best solutions. You may already have thought of some better ones for yourselves. But they are solutions that have been thought about and tried by people who have wondered about these problems as you are doing.

##### Suggestion for Problem 1: RENT REBATES

First came the problem of rent.

We have already spoken of the subsidies that are given to enable the lower paid tenants to get good accommodation. But not all municipal tenants are poor. For example, the Browns, who live next door to the Smiths, have two grown-up children, who are each earning and contribute something every week to the family income. The Browns cannot afford a house in the open market, built for profit by private enterprise. On the other hand, they can comfortably afford the economic rent of the Council house, and do not need extra help from public money. The Smiths, however, with their family of four small children, cannot afford to pay the rent even when it is reduced by the subsidy.

A method of adapting the rent to suit the income of the

tenants has been sanctioned by Parliament in the 1930 Housing Act, and more fully in the Act of 1936. It is suggested that the subsidy is intended for the tenant who needs it, for as long as he needs it, and that it should not be used for all the municipal houses, irrespective of the income of their tenants.

This method is called the system of rent rebates, or differential renting; the idea being that the rent paid shall be adjusted to the income of the tenant and the number of people he has to keep on that income. These rebates can therefore be arranged in many different ways. The most usual way is to deduct a certain amount, say 6d. or 1s., from the weekly rent for every child in the family who is not earning. A number of local housing authorities already carry out some such scheme. In Leeds, for instance, the Council found, after making a survey of the incomes of their tenants, that quite a number could pay the full economic rent of the house. Instead, therefore, of giving a flat rate subsidy to every house, the sums payable under the subsidy were put into a pool and used to supplement the rent of tenants who were not able to pay as much; these rebates for each individual tenant being worked out according to a scale based on their income and on the number of their children. This scheme was particularly carefully worked out, though the system has since been altered owing to a change in the political character of the Council.

In other places other means are adopted in addition to the rebate for the individual child, which is perhaps the most usual form. Sometimes one-fifth of the tenant's income is taken as a suitable proportion that he should spend in rent, irrespective of the number of children he has. The system is spreading rapidly, and details can be found in a pamphlet called *Rent Rebates*, written by Geoffrey Wilson.<sup>23</sup>

However excellent this system may be in the case of houses erected by the local authorities, it can, of course, not solve the rent problem for large, poor families in houses owned by private landlords. This is why many people think that a better system for arriving at the same end, and of do-

ing a great deal for the welfare of children, is to adopt some system of family allowances, such as has been tried in many countries abroad, e.g. in Australia and New Zealand. Family allowances consist in giving a weekly sum to each family on behalf of each dependent child, and are as a rule paid for either by the State or by the employer.<sup>21</sup>

#### Suggestion for Problem 2: MANAGEMENT

The answer to Problem 2 lies clearly in skilled housing management.

Management in this case does not mean looking after bricks and mortar, drains, and paintwork. It means sympathetic attention to the human being for whom those bricks and mortar have been made into a habitation.

There are various systems of management, and as circumstances vary with different places it is not advisable to lay down one special method as the best. You may read of them in detail in the Ministry of Health Report on the Management of Municipal Housing Estates,<sup>25</sup> and in the publications of the Society of Women Housing Managers, and the Institute of Housing.

Octavia Hill, who inaugurated the system on which the Women Housing Managers work, considered that the manager should be a trained woman who could unite in one person the duties of rent collector, repairs surveyor, and welfare worker. She felt that, as it was the housewife from whom the rent was generally received, it was easier for her to invite a woman into her home to discuss her difficulties than a man, and that the collecting of rents gave the manager an official reason for her call, enabling her slowly to win the tenant's confidence.<sup>26</sup>

The Institute of Housing, on the other hand, is of opinion that the social service side of management should be independent of rent collecting and repairs, and it therefore advocates an independent welfare worker in co-operation with, but separate from, the rent collector.

Another system that has occasionally been tried is that of holding tenants' committees, where complaints can be

aired, and suggestions received. But this calls for skilled and tactful management from the Chair.

#### Suggestion for Problem 3: COMMUNITY LIFE<sup>17, 18, 27, 29, d</sup>

Now we come to the problem of how several hundred strangers, dumped down together on a new housing estate can grow into a happy friendly community.

There is probably no need to suggest to you that the answer is to be found in common interests. But it is necessary to provide for those interests, and to provide them so that they lie within a reasonable distance of the home. One would like to picture a community grouped in such a way that it can indulge its leisure with every form of activity. So that the churches lie within easy reach, libraries and reading rooms, evening classes and other educational facilities within walking distance, sports grounds, swimming baths, and cinemas but a penny bus ride away, and plays, concerts, dances, and clubs at a reasonable distance. So that hobbies may be easily pursued—carpentry and cooking classes, dressmaking and dancing lessons, and that absorbing interest, gardening.

Efforts are being made by Community Associations to establish such groups on the new estates, but it is sometimes difficult to provide such facilities, and there is room for much development in this movement.

It is important, too, when rehousing large numbers of people, to see that they consist of a variety of ages and occupations, so that people of all kinds can meet each other, instead of getting segregated in their own type or age.<sup>17</sup>

#### Suggestions for Problems 4 and 5: DECENTRALIZATION

Problem No. 4 is the most important of all, and the biggest, for if you solve this you go far to solve problems 5 and 6, and many other problems as well. There is an answer to it, and it was found, not by an expert, an architect, a builder, or a sociologist, but by an ordinary person like you and me. That is why we say you must not think that you can

never know enough about these problems to be able to solve them.

You remember that in the Story of Housing we mentioned a Mr Howard,<sup>31</sup> who went every day to the Law Courts, and took down the speeches in shorthand. It was he who found the answer.

The Smiths want to live in pleasant and open surroundings, but their work is in the town. To bring the Smiths to their work created, as we found, innumerable difficulties. Supposing, then, we take their work to the Smiths.

Why, thought Ebenezer Howard, could not towns be built where the workers could have gardens and green surroundings and yet be near their workplaces? Put the factories where there is space, build the houses fairly near by, plan the whole town properly from the start, with a ring of country all round in which farmers could continue to grow food, and you have the best of both worlds. You have the advantages of the town, such as schools, cinemas, clubs, and shops within reach of every one, the comforts of lighting, heating, water, and drainage. But you also have the advantage of a garden to your house, plenty of playing fields, your work within walking or cycling distance, and the open country not far away.<sup>32</sup>

Ebenezer Howard actually started two towns on these lines in Hertfordshire, and these two towns (Letchworth, begun in 1904, and Welwyn, begun in 1920),<sup>33</sup> are now busy industrial centres where thousands of people work and live under good conditions. It is worth while to visit these new towns and to judge for yourselves. They are not yet complete, for they are planned for 35,000 to 45,000 people each, and so far only have about a third to half of that number, but you can already form some idea of what the complete towns will be like.

The same thing could be done in other places, if public opinion understood the subject and demanded it. There are, of course, some difficulties, but they are not insuperable. You might indeed inquire into the difficulties, and work out a solution for yourselves. Decentralization would solve



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PLAYGROUND IN LETCHWORTH (Close to Workers' Homes)

so many other problems, including our latest one of A.R.P., that it is well worth the effort of surmounting the difficulties of bringing it about.

#### Solution 6: PLANNED TOWNS<sup>31-34</sup>

But, you say, would not this make the next problem even worse than it is now? The big towns are already sprawling over the countryside, and if we made new towns there would be still less country.

On the contrary. If our whole population were accommodated in small towns such as I have described, they would only take up, spread out with gardens to each house, 4,313 square miles. Whereas at present, in spite of the way people are packed into the centres of the cities, they spread over 6,500 square miles.\*

This does not mean, however, that we need pepper the country with little towns, for we should only do as much as is needed to clear the congested centres of our big cities, and to replan them in a less crowded, and more open way.<sup>35, 36</sup>

Moreover, if we had a more active and positive plan for our housing, it might be possible to control the hideous design of the exterior of so many of our new houses, which have been hastily put up to supply the urgent need, and also the litter of shacks and bungalows pushing their way along our coasts.<sup>37</sup> It is possible to build houses that are typical and appropriate and not a deformity to the surrounding countryside, such for example as the stone villages of Dorset.<sup>38, 39</sup>

Under the Town and Country Planning Act, 1932, any town can now control the way all future building takes place.<sup>40</sup> Factories can be grouped in certain places, shops so that they are convenient to houses, and the plan can also provide where roads and open spaces are to go. Architecture can be controlled so that ugliness is prevented, and excessive advertisement hoardings can be forbidden. Is

\* Sir Raymond Unwin, November 26th, 1938, at the National Housing and Town Planning Conference at Harrogate.

your own town making the most of its powers for Town and Country Planning? Is any effort being made to maintain a green belt round it for the benefit of your children, and of future generations?<sup>11. E</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

What conclusions, then, may we draw from this effort to take a bird's eye view of the Housing Problem?

We have found that it is a problem that seems to influence nearly every side of our national life. We have found that it exists over the whole country, but that it varies in type, in quantity, and in quality according to the neighbourhood. We have found by looking into its history two factors that were responsible for the present muddle; lack of forethought and the apathy of Public Opinion. We have found that, in spite of all the efforts made by the Government, the Local Councils, and many voluntary bodies, both slums and over-crowding exist to-day, and that the remedies that deal with them have themselves brought new problems. And we have found that these new problems are again largely due to lack of forethought.

What can we do, as Members of Public Opinion? We can do three things.

First we can learn the conditions of our own locality, and its particular problems.

Secondly, we can decide upon the best way to better those conditions, and to solve those problems.

And thirdly, fortified by our knowledge and our decision, we can rouse Public Opinion in our turn, by talking about these problems; we can urge upon our Local Council the necessity of dealing with them in the right way; and we can support or initiate voluntary organizations, such as those mentioned in Section (e), in order to maintain interest and enthusiasm.

What will you do? Will you allow shelters that are not homes, housing estates that are not communities, rents that

entail malnutrition, a countryside peppered with ugly buildings? Or will you insist on planning, which doesn't mean formality, forethought, which doesn't mean restraint, work-places with the country around them, homes but a walk from the work?

It is for you, as units of Public Opinion, to decide.

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D. Rural Housing. £1 1s. plus carriage.

E. New Homes for Old. Different Aspects of Housing and Town Planning. In sections. Price according to amount required.

FILMS

Apply to The Housing Centre, 13 Suffolk Street, Pall Mall, S.W.1. Charge for Hire 5s. per reel.

a. The Great Crusade. 35 mm. sound. 18 minutes. Free.

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“TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING,” the Journal of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association, published Quarterly at 1s. (5s. per annum, post free) deals in an interesting way with the town and country questions raised in this booklet.

